The STOLEN SINGER

by MARTHA BELLINGER

SYNOPSIS.

Agatha Redmond, opera singer, starting for an auto drive in New York, finds a stranger sent as her chauffeur. She is annoyed, but he remains. Leaving the car, she goes into the park to read the will of an old friend of her mother, who has left her property. There she is accosted by a stranger, who follows her to the auto, climbs in and chloroforms her.

CHAPTER II.—Continued.

So he remembered Clara Van Camp's advice, wrote the whole story to Aleck, and cast about for the one successful business chance in the four thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine bad ones—as the statistics have it.

He actually found it in shoes. Football muscle and grit went into the job of putting superior shoe on inferior foot, if necessary—at least on some foot. He got a chance to try his powers in the home branch of a manufacturing house, and made good. When he came to fill a position where there was opportunity to try new ideas, he tried them. He inspected tanneries and stockyards. He got composite measurements of all the feet in all the women's colleges in the year ninety-seven, he drilled salesmen and opened a night school for the buttonhole-makers, he made scientific study of heels, and he invented an aristocratic arch and put it on the market.

The family joked about his doings as the harmless experiments of a lively boy, but presently they began to enjoy his income. Through it all they were affectionate and kind, with the matter-of-course fondness which a family gives to the members that takes the part of useful drudge. John, the pet of the parents, married, and had his own eyes opened, it is to be supposed. Donald, the genius, had just arrived, after a dozen years or so, at the stage where he was mentioned now and then in the literary journals. But Jim stuck to shoes and kept the family on a fair tide of modest prosperity.

Once, in the years of Jim's apprenticeship to life, there came over him a fit of soul-sickness that nearly proved his ruin.

"I can't stand this," he wrote to Aleck Van Camp; "it's too hard and dry and sordid for any man that's got a soul. It isn't the grind I mind, though that is bar enough; it is the 'Commercial Idea' that eats into a man's innards. He forgets there are things that money can't buy, and in his heart he grows contemptuous of anything to be had 'without money and without price.' He can't help it. If he is thinking of trade nine-tenths of the time, his mind gets set that way. I'm ready any minute to jump the fence, like father's old colt up on the farm. I'm not a snob, but I recognize now that there was some reason for all our old Hambleton ancestors being so finicky about trade.

"Do you remember how we used to talk, when we were kiddies, about keeping our ideals? Well, I believe I'm bankrupt, Aleck, in my account with ideals. I don't want to howl, and these remarks don't go with anybody else, but I can say to you, I want them back again."

Aleck did as a kiddie should do, writing much advice on long sheets of paper, and illustrating his points richly, like a good Scotchman, with scientific instances. A month or two later he contrived to have work to do in Boston, so that he could go out to Lynn and look up Jimmy's case. He even devised a cure by creating, in his mind, an office in the biological world which was to be offered to James on the ground that science needed just his abilities and training. But when Aleck arrived in Lynn he found that Jim, in some fashion or other, had found a cure for himself. He was deeper than ever in the business, and yet, in some spiritual sense, he had found himself. He had captured his ideal again and yoked it to duty—which is a great feat.

After twelve years of ferocious labor, with no vacations to speak of, James' mind took a turn for the worse. Physically he was as sound as a bell, though of lath-like thinness; but an effervescing in his blood lured his mind away from the study of lasts and accounts and Parisian models and sent it careering, like Satan, up and down the earth. Romance, which had been drugged during the transition from youth to manhood, awoke and coaxed for its rights, and whispered tauntingly in an ear not yet dulled to its voice. Freedom, open spaces, laughter, the fresh sweep of the wind, the high buccaneering piracy of life and joy—these things beglamoured his senses.

So one day he locked his desk with a final click. The business was in good shape. It is but justice to say that if it had not been, Romance had dangled her luring wisp o' light in vain. Several of his new schemes had worked out well, his subordinates were of one mind with him, trade was flourishing. He felt he could afford a little spin.

Jimsy's radiating fancies focussed themselves, at last, on the vision of a trig little sail-boat, "a jug of wine, a loaf of bread" in the cabin, with possibly a book of verses underneath the bow, or more suitably, in the shadow of the sail; and Aleck Van Camp and himself astir in the rigging or plunging together from the gunwale for an early swim. "And before I get off, I'll hear a singer that can sing," he declared.

He telegraphed Aleck, who was by this time running down the eyelid of the squid, to meet him at his club in New York. Then he made short work with the family. Experience had taught him that an attack from ambush was most successful.

"Look here, Edith"—this was at the breakfast-table the very morning of his departure. Edith was sixteen, the tallest girl in the academy, almost ready for college and reckoned quite a queen in her world—"You be good and do my chores for me while I'm away, and I'll bring you home a duke. Take care of mother's bronchitis, and keep the house straight. I'm going on a cruise."

"All right, Jim"—Edith could always be counted on to catch the ball—"go ahead and have a bully time and don't drown yourself. I'll drive the team straight to water, mother and dad and the whole outfit, trust me!"

Considering the occasion and the correctness of the sentiments, Jim forbore, for once, from making the daily suggestion that she chasten her language. By the time the family appeared, Jim had laid out a rigid course of action for Miss Edith, who rose to the occasion like a soldier.

"Mother'll miss you, of course, but Jack and Harold"—two of Edith's admirers—"Jack and Harold can come around every day—stout arm to lean upon, that sort of thing. You know mother can't be a bit jolly without plenty of men about, and since Sue became engaged she really doesn't count. The boys will think they are running things, of course, but they'll see my iron hand in the velvet glove—you can throw a blue chip on that, Jimsy. And don't kiss me, Jim, for Dorothy Snell and I vowed, when we wished each other's rings on—Oh, well, brothers don't count."

And so, amid the farewells of a tender, protesting family, he got off, leaving Edith in the midst of one of her monologues.

There was a telegram in New York saying that Aleck Van Camp would join him in three days, at the latest. Hambleton disliked the club and left it, although his first intention had been to put up there. He picked out a modest, up-town hotel, new to him, for no other reason than that it had a pretty name, The Larue. Then he began to consider details.

The day after his arrival was occupied in making arrangements for his boat. He put into this matter the same painstaking buoyancy that he had put into a dull business for twelve years. He changed his plans half a dozen times, and exceeded them wholly in the size and equipment of the little vessel, and in the consequent expense; but he justified himself, as men will, by a dozen good reasons. The trig little sail-boat turned out to be a respectable yacht, steam, at that. She was called the Sea Gull. Neat in the beam, stanch in the bows, rigged for coasting and provided with a decent living outfit, she was "good enough for any gentleman," in the opinion of the agent who rented her. Jim was half ashamed at giving up the more robust scheme of sailing his own boat, with Aleck; but some vague and expansive spirit moved him "to see," as he said, "what it would be like to go as far and as fast as we please." While they were about it, they would call on some cousins at Bar Harbor and get good fun out of it.

The idea of his holiday grew as he played with it. As his spin took on a more complicated character, his zest rose. He went forth on Sunday feeling as if some vital change was impending. His little cruise loomed up large, important, epochal. He laughed at himself and thought, with his customary optimism, that a vacation was worth waiting twelve years for, if waiting endowed it with such a flavor. Jim knew that Aleck would relish the spin, too. Aleck's nature was that of a grind tempered with sportiness. Jim sat down Sunday morning and wrote out the whole program for Aleck's endorsement, sent the letter by special delivery and went out to reconnoiter.

The era of Sunday orchestral concerts had begun, but that day, to Jim's regret, the singer was not a contralto. "Dramatic Soprano" was on the program; a new name, quite unknown to Jim. His interest in the soloist waned, but the orchestra was enough. He thanked Heaven that he was past the primitive stage of thinking any single voice more interesting than the assemblage of instruments known as orchestra.

Hambleton found a place in the dim vastness of the hall, and sank into his seat in a mood of vivid anticipation. The instruments twanged, the audience gathered, and at last the music began. Its first effect was to rouse Hambleton to a sharp attention to details—the director, the people in the orchestra, the people in the boxes; and then he settled down, thinking his thoughts. The past, the future, life and its meaning, love and its power, the long, long thoughts of youth and ambition and desire came flocking to his brain. The noble confluence of sound that is music worked upon him its immemorial miracle; his heart softened, his imagination glowed, his spirit stirred. Time was lost to him—and earth.

The orchestra ceased, but Hambleton did not heed the commotion about him. The pause and the fresh beginning of the strings scarcely disturbed his ecstatic reverie. A deep hush lay upon the vast assemblage, broken only by the voices of the violins. And then, in the zone of silence that lay over the listening people—silence that vibrated to the memory of the strings—there rose a little song. To Hambleton, sitting absorbed, it was as if the circuit which galvanized him into life had suddenly been completed. He sat up. The singer's lips were slightly parted, and her voice at first was no more than the half-voice of a flute, sweet, gentle, beguiling. It was borne upward on the crest of the melody, fuller and fuller, as on a flooding tide.

"Free of my pain, free of my burden of sorrow,
At last I shall see thee—"

There was freedom in the voice, and the sense of space, of wind on the waters, of life and the love of life.

Jimsy was a soft-hearted fellow. He never knew what happened to him; but after uncounted minutes he seemed to be choking, while the orchestra and the people in boxes and the singer herself swam in a hazy distance. He shook himself, called somebody he knew very well an idiot, and laughed aloud in his joy; but his laugh did not matter, for it was drowned in the roar of applause that reached the roof.

Jim did not applaud. He went outdoors to think about it; and after a time he found, to his surprise, that he could recall not only the song, but the singer, quite distinctly. It was a tall, womanly figure, and a fair, bright face framed abundantly with dark hair, and the least little humorous twitch to her lips. And her name was Agatha Redmond.

"Of course, she can sing; but it isn't like having the real thing—'tisn't an alto," said Jimsy ungratefully and just from habit.

The day's experience filled his thoughts and quieted his restlessness. He awaited Aleck with entire patience. Monday morning he spent in small necessary business affairs, securing, among other things, several hundred dollars, which he put in his money-belt. About the middle of the afternoon he left his hotel, engaged a taxicab and started for Riverside. The late summer day was fine, with the afternoon haze settling over river and town. He watched the procession of carriages, the horseback riders, the people afoot, the children playing on the grass, with a feeling of comradeship. Was he not also tasting freedom—a lord of the earth? His gaze traveled out to the river, with the glimmer here and there of a tug-boat, a little steamer, or the white sail of a pleasure craft. The blood of some seagoing ancestor stirred in his veins, and he thrilled at the thought of the days to come when his prow should be headed offshore.

The taxicab had its limitations, and Hambleton suddenly became impatient of its monotonous slithering along the firm road. Telling the driver to follow him, he descended and crossed to where Cathedral Parkway switches off. He walked briskly, feeling the tonic of the sea air, and circled the cathedral, where workmen were lounging away after their day's toil. The unfinished edifice loomed up like a giant skeleton of some prehistoric era, and through its mighty open arches and buttresses Jim saw fleecy clouds scudding across the western sky. A stone saint, muffled in burlap, had just been swung up into his windy niche, but had not yet discarded his robes of the world. Hambleton was regarding the shapeless figure with mild interest, wondering which saint of the calendar could look so grotesque, when a sound drew his attention sharply to earth. It was a small sound, but there was something strange about it. It was startling as a flash in a summer sky.

Besides the workmen, there was no living thing in sight on the hillside except his own taxicab, swinging slowly up the avenue at that moment, and a covered motor-car getting up speed a square away. Even as the car approached, Hambleton decided that the strange sound had proceeded from its ambushed tonneau; and it was, surely, a human voice of distress. He stepped forward to the curb. The car was upon him, then lumbered heavily and swiftly past. But on the instant of its passing there appeared, beneath the lifted curtain and quite near his own face, the face of the singer of yesterday; and from pale, agonized lips, as if with dying breath, she cried, "Help, help!"

Hambleton knew her instantly, although the dark abundance of her hair was almost lost beneath hat and flowing veil, and the bright, humorous expression was blotted out by fear. He stood for a moment rooted to the curb, watching the dark mass of the car as it swayed down the hill. Then he beckoned sharply to his driver, met the taxicab half way, and pointed to the disappearing machine.

"Quick! Can you overtake it?"

"I'd like nothing better than to run down one o' them Dook machines!" said the driver.

CHAPTER III.

Midsummer Madness.

The driver of the taxicab proved to be a sound sport.

Five minutes of luck, aided by nerve, brought the two machines somewhat nearer together. The motor-car gained in the open spaces, the taxicab caught up when it came to weaving its way in and out and dodging the trolleys. At the frequent moments when he appeared to be losing the car, Hambleton reflected that he had its number, which might lead to something. At the Waldorf the car slowed up, and the cab came within a few yards. Hambleton made up his mind at that instant that he had been mistaken in his supposition of trouble threatening the lady, and looked momently to see her step from the car into the custody of those starched and lacquered menials who guard the portals of fashionable hotels.

But it was so. A signal was interchanged between the occupants of the car and some watcher in the doorway, and the car sped on. Hambleton, watching steadily, wondered.

"If she is being kidnaped, why doesn't she make somebody hear? Plenty of chance. They couldn't have killed her—that isn't done."

And yet his heart smote him as he remembered the terror and distress written on that countenance and the cry for help.

"Something was the matter," memory insisted. "There they go west; west Tenth, Alexander Street, Tenth Avenue—"

The car lumbered on, the cab half a block, often more, in the rear, through endless regions of small shops and offices huddled together above narrow sidewalks, through narrow and winding streets paved with cobblestones and jammed with cars and trucks, squeezing past curbs where dirty children sat playing within a few inches of death-dealing wheels. Hambleton wondered what kept them from being killed by hundreds daily, but the wonder was immediately forgotten in a new subject for thought. The cab had stopped, although several yards of clear road lay ahead of it. The driver was climbing down. The motor-car was nosing its way along nearly a block ahead. Hambleton leaped out.

"Of course, we've broken down?" he mildly inquired. Deep in his heart he was superstitiously thinking that he would let fate determine his next move; if there were obstacles in the way of his further quest, well and good; he would follow the Face no longer.

"If you'll wait just a minute—" the driver was saying, "until I get my kit out—"

But Hambleton, looking ahead, saw that the car had disappeared, and his mind suddenly veered.

"Not this time," he announced. "Here, the meter says four-twenty—you take this, I'm off." He put a five-dollar bill into the hand of the driver and started on an easy run toward the west.

He had caught sight of the smoke-stacks and masts in the near distance, telling him that the motor-car had almost, if not quite, reached the river. Such a vehicle could not disappear and leave no trace; it ought to be easy to find. Ahead of him flaring lights alternated with the steady, piercing brilliance of the incandescents, and both struggled against the lingering daylight.

A heavy policeman at the corner had seen the car. He pointed west into the cavernous darkness of the wharves.

"If she ain't down at the Imperial docks she's gone plump into the river, for that's the way she went," he insisted. The policeman had the bearing of a major-general and the accent of the city of Cork. Hambleton went on past the curving street-car tracks, dodged a loaded dray emerging from the dock, and threaded his way under the shed. He passed piles of trunks, and a couple of truckmen dumping assorted freight from an ocean liner. No motor-car or veiled lady, nor sound of anything like a woman's voice. Hambleton came out into the street again, looked about for another probable avenue of escape for the car and was at the point of bafflement, when the major-general pounded slowly along his way.

"In there, my son, and no nice place either!" pointing to a smaller entrance alongside the Imperial docks, almost concealed by swinging signs. It was plainly a forbidden way, and at first sight appeared too narrow for the passage of any vehicle whatsoever. But examination showed that it was not too narrow; moreover, it opened on a level with the street.

"If you really want her, she's in there, though what'll be to pay if you go in there without a permit, I don't know. I'd hate to have to arrest you."

"It might be the best thing for me if you did, but I'm going in. You might wait here a minute, Captain, if you will."

"I will that; more especially as that car was a stunner for speed and I already had my eye on her. I'd like to see you fish her out of that hole."

But Hambleton was out of earshot and out of sight. An empty passage smelling of bilge-water and pent-up gases opened suddenly on to the larger dock. Damp flooring with wide cracks stretched off to the left; on the right the solid planking terminated suddenly in huge piles, against which the water, capped with scum and weeds, splashed fitfully. The river bank, lined with docks, seemed lulled into temporary quietness. Ferry-boats steamed at their labors farther up and down the river, but the currents of travel left here and there a peaceful quarter such as this.

Hambleton's gaze searched the dock and the river in a rapid survey. The dock itself was dim and vast, with a few workmen looking like ants in the distance. It offered nothing of encouragement; but on the river, fifty yards away, and getting farther away every minute, was a yacht's tender. The figures of the two rowers were quite distinct, their oars making rhythmical flashes over the water, but it was impossible to say exactly what freight, human or otherwise, it carried. It was evident that there were people aboard, possibly several. Even as Hambleton strained his eyes to see, the outlines of the rowboat merged into the dimness. It was pointed like a gun toward a large yacht lying at anchor further out in the stream. The vessel swayed pretily to the current, and slowly swung its dim light from the masthead.

"They've got her—out in that boat," said Hambleton to himself, feeling, while the words were on his lips, that he was drawing conclusions unwarranted by the evidence. Thus he stood, one foot on the slippery log siding of the dock, watching while the little drama played itself out, so far as his present knowledge could go. His judgment still hung in suspense, but his senses quickened themselves to detect, if possible, what the outcome might be. He saw the tender approach the boat, lie alongside; saw one sailor after another descend the rope ladder, saw a limp, inert mass lifted from the rowboat and carried up, as if it had been merchandise, to the deck of the yacht; saw two men follow the limp bundle over the gunwale; and finally saw the boat herself drawn up and placed in her davits. Hambleton's mind at last slid to its conclusion, like a bolt into its socket.

"They're kidnaping her, without a doubt," he said slowly. For a moment he was like one struck stupid. Slowly he turned to the dock, looking up and down its orderly but unprepossessing clutter. Dim lights shone here and there, and a few hands were at work at the farther end. The dull silence, the unresponsive preoccupation of whatever life was in sight, made it all seem as remote from him and from this tragedy as from the stars.

In fact, it was impersonal and remote to such a degree that Hambleton's practical mind halted yet an instant, in doubt whether there were not some plausible explanation. The thought came back to him suddenly that the motor-car must be somewhere in the neighborhood if his conclusion were correct.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Steam for the Soil.

For a year or two past certain growers of tomatoes, cucumbers and similar vegetables for the London market have been injecting steam into the soil with a view to destroying insects and slugs. It is reported that the plan works very well for that purpose, but the operation brought to light an unexpected fact—namely, that the soil thus treated increased greatly in fertility; so greatly, indeed, that the ordinary amount of manure cannot be used afterward.

This effect has been explained as being due to the sterilization produced by the steam, which kills the phagocytes or protozoa which in ordinary circumstances keep down the number of bacteria in the soil whose operations are beneficent in turning organic nitrogen into plant food.—Harper's Weekly.

Take the Responsibility.

Don't throw sand into your own eyes by finding an excuse for your mistakes in someone else.

Has Caught Fancy of Paris--The One-Piece Walking Suit

One-piece walking suit of copper-colored charmeuse with narrow lace collar.

HOW TO WHITEN THE THROAT

Lemon Juice or a Ripe Tomato Will Remove Any Discolorations—Alcohol to Harden.

Shapeliness is not all that is necessary to the making of a throat beautiful. The texture of the skin must be fine and soft, white and unblemished. Cleanliness is the first essential. A good thorough scrubbing with a not too soft brush, hot water and soap, once or twice a week, will do no harm, the rest of the time using the ordinary cloth. Apply lemon juice or a ripe tomato to any discolorations that may appear, and unless the pores are enlarged, use cold cream freely.

Alcohol will harden the flesh. As for the various bleaches, there are some that are harmless, except insofar as they invariably are drying, which ultimately leaves the skin harsh and brash. Here is one that can easily be made at home, but, like the others, it is drying, so be sure to counteract this effect by applying cold cream after using it. Mix half an ounce of peroxide of hydrogen, six ounces of witch-hazel and half an ounce of lactic acid. Apply this with a soft cloth.

DAINTY SUMMER DRESS.

A summer dress of white lace embroidered in yellow with underskirt of white charmeuse. Belt of yellow taffeta.

Wardrobe Box.

A space saver is the wardrobe box which fits under the bed. This box is suspended from two metal arms, or bars, which are affixed to the bed. This makes it possible to draw the box in and out without trouble. The box does not touch the floor, so there is no possibility of dust accumulating under it, and the bed, with the box in position, may be moved at will. The boxes, which are provided with hinged covers, come in different sizes and are designed for different purposes.

MUST BE HAND EMBROIDERED

The Proper Thing for Both White and Colored Linen Parasols—Wide Variety of Designs.

White and colored linen parasols show hand embroidery. They are mounted with ivory or bone handles and tips or with light natural or polished wood handles and brass-pointed tips. Some of them are finished about the edge with fringe, some with a plain hem and some with an embroidered scallop. A wide variety of designs is shown in embroidered parasols. Satin stitch, eyelet work and outlining are used in combination to produce both ornate and simple effects. Almost all parasols are made with eight panels, and half a dozen skeins of cotton are needed for embroidering each panel with a design of moderate size; five or six dozen skeins, therefore, would be sufficient for any parasol. The big department stores make up the embroidered panels into parasols and sell sticks and frames.

FLOWERS THAT MATCH FROCK

One of the Prettiest Fancies of Many Seasons Is the Adornment Thus Effected.

What a real pleasure women missed when they were too prim to tuck a bunch of flowers into their frocks, or too fearful lest the stalks should stain their pretty raiment.

Nowadays flowers are the finishing touch of every toilette, and some women give orders to their florists or their gardeners for a bouquet twice or thrice a day to match the gowns they intend to wear.

In the evening it is usual to wear a single and very exquisite blossom, the work of human hands. A giant rose, a mammoth poppy, an orchid—all are popular. Strange fantasies in material are employed; here a lace flower tipped with fur, and there one made of hand painted mousseline, a marvelous copy of nature's own handiwork.

Lace Blouses.

Lace will be a feature of the coming summer, and the heavy lace blouse will be once more indispensable. For some time cluny, Irish point, and Bruges have been neglected, and now they are to be revived; not in pure white, but in a deep ochre tint. I have seen one in a combination of Irish and cluny made in kimono fashion, with the sleeves half way down the arm in black satin. These sleeves do not reach much beyond the elbow, and the introduction of the black satin near the skin gives a new touch to the lace blouse. A slim white throat looks well uncovered, and the new blouses are made without collar bands, as were most of the bodices last winter. But where the throat is marked, it as as well to cover it with transparent net.

Crepe Waists.

A college girl who wore cotton crepe waists to save her laundry bills, had difficulty in rendering them wearable at first, as they were too limp if not starched at all and, if starched, wringing them made the starch uneven, says the Modern Priscilla. She experimented until she found that by washing them in thin starch and hanging them up to drain on a coat hanger, without wringing, they were exactly right.

Cromwell Collar.

The Cromwell is the name given to a linen collar which is mounted on an upstanding band. The collar falls over the band. It is trimmed on one side with linen-covered buttons, while buttonholes are worked at corresponding places on the other side of the collar.

WIPED OUT ARMED CRIMINALS

Russian Police Show Little Mercy When Dealing With Desperate Men Who Defy Authority.

It is only a few years since a Montreal (Canada) man, well known about town for his eccentricities of manner, startled the community one summer evening by barricading himself in an uptown boarding house, and with the aid of a rifle succeeded in keeping at bay the police and detective forces of the city. Even the fire department, which was called to the aid of the police, could not avail to suppress the lone defier of the law, who killed one policeman outright, and succeeded in wounding the head of the detective force, Silas Carpenter, now chief of police of Edmonton, Alberta. The man was eventually wounded, captured and convicted of murder, but never executed. He was adjudged insane.

Away in far-off Russia in a little village near Odessa, a band of robbers waylaid and robbed a bank messenger the other day of $15,000. Tracked by the police to an isolated cottage on the outskirts of the town, the men opened a fusilade on their pursuers and seriously wounded two constables. Then the officer in command of the police squad resolved to adopt desperate measures. Despatching a constable to the local arsenal he procured a powerful bomb. This was thrown through a window, with the result that the cottage was utterly wrecked and the five bandits killed. The police-master of the village has now issued an order to the effect that in all future cases where armed robbers take refuge in a detached dwelling and compel a siege, bombs may be employed in order to avoid casualties to the besieging police.

Shipyards Kept Busy.

The shipyards of the leading commercial nations of the world are still very busy, notwithstanding the large additions recently made to the available tonnage of the merchant marine of Europe and America. Last year's losses were uncommonly heavy, headed, of course, by the Titanic disaster, and there is a record-breaking volume of traffic by sea in all parts of the civilized world. The approaching opening of the Panama canal has an important effect upon the demand for new vessels of large tonnage and high power.

There's hardly any way to be such a nuisance as to have strong convictions.—New York Press.